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ABSTRACT

This study compared interest, personality, and ability scores of vocationally undecided students who, after counseling, either selected a major or remained undecided. No significant differences were found between undecided and decided females. Vocationally undecided and decided males differed significantly on six Strong Vocational Interest Blank scores and on one Omnibus Personality Inventory score. Comments are made on the implications of this study on the vocational counseling process and the need for further research in this area. (Author)

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COUNSELING STUDENTS WHO LACK VOCATIONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract

This study compared interest, personality, and ability scores of vocationally undecided students who, after counseling, either selected a major or remained undecided. No significant differences were found between undecided and decided females. Vocationally undecided and decided males differed significantly on six Strong Vocational Interest Blank scores and on one Omnibus Personality Inventory score. Comments are made on the implications of this study on the vocational counseling process and the need for further research in this area.

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Students who are undecided about a choice of major make up a large part of the clientele at most university counseling centers. Such cases are usually regarded as rather routine cases. A typical approach is to hold an initial interview with the client, assign some tests, and then spend two or three sessions discussing the test results and their implications with the client. The assumption underlying this approach is that this information about self will enable the client to make a decision about selecting a major. Very little research has been done concerning the outcome of this type of counseling. That is, very little is known about the post counseling decisions made by this kind of client. Does he, as a result of counseling, make a vocational decision? It would be helpful in addition to know more about the undecided student and how he differs from others.

Appel and Haak (1968) point out that sound vocational decisions cannot be maximized by the use of large amounts of data. With extreme amount of information, "overload" may occur. They go on to say that vocational choice seems easiest when three or four alternatives are present. Appel, Haak and Witzke (1970), in describing the undecided student, found six meaningful factors emerging: (1) situation-specific choice anxiety, (2) data-seeking

orientation, (3) concern with self-identity, (4) generalized indecision, (5) multiplicity of interest, and (6) humanitarian orientation. The heterogeneity of these undecided students suggests that a variety of courses of action would be appropriate in aiding them. Baird (1967) surveyed a sample of 12,000 decided and undecided students and found they did not differ substantially from each other on any of the American College Survey measures. In a second sample of nearly 60,000 college-bound students, Baird (1967) found the undecided student to be more intellectually oriented and less vocationally oriented than students who have made a vocational choice. Ashby, Wall and Osipow (1966) categorized 200 college freshmen as undecided, tentative, or decided regarding educational-vocational goals. The decided and undecided groups were academically superior to the tentative group. The undecided group showed greater need for dependence. Vocational-educational decisions were not related to clarity of interests. These authors point out that counseling for students with tentative plans should involve development of a choice consistent with preparation, or remedial work, while counseling for undecided students should focus on dependency. Buck (1970) studied 120 male college seniors who had uncrystallized interests when they entered college. He found extensiveness of vocational exploration, the student's Scholastic Aptitude Test-Verbal, and his score on the California Psychological Inventory-Flexibility Test to be unrelated to crystallization of vocational interests. Resnick, Fauble and Osipow (1970) failed

to substantiate the hypothesis that high self-esteem is associated with advanced vocational crystallization. They did find, however, that the high self-esteem group expressed significantly more certainty about their career choice than did their counterparts in the low self-esteem group. Korman (1967 and 1969) reported that high self-esteem individuals perceive themselves as having the necessary stereotypical qualities of the vocations they choose, and furthermore, they choose those vocations which will fulfil their needs. His findings suggest that low self-esteem persons seem to choose vocations with little regard for their own needs or their feelings of having those qualities associated with the specific occupations.

The research reviewed here presents a confusing picture. Appel, Haak and Witzke (1970); Baird (1967); and Buck (1970) find little difference between the vocationally undecided and the decided student. It would appear, then, that many normal students would be undecided about a vocation. On the other hand, Ashby, Wall and Osipow (1966); Resnick, Fauble and Osipow (1970); Korman (1967 and 1969); and Baird (1967) find some personality and other differences between the vocationally undecided and decided student.

The purpose of the present investigation was to study vocationally undecided students who either selected a major or did not select a major after counseling. More specifically, this study will attempt to define what differences exist between vocationally decided and undecided students on personality,

interest, and ability measures. Implications for vocational counseling will be discussed.

Method

During the academic year 1970-71, 30 males and 33 females who were vocationally undecided sought counseling at the University of Kentucky's Counseling Center. As part of the counseling procedure, all subjects completed the Strong Vocational Interest Blank (SVIB). Scores on the Omnibus Personality Inventory (OPI) and the American College Test (ACT), taken prior to college entry, were also available. A follow-up survey was conducted during the fall semester of 1971 to determine which students were still undecided or had by then selected a major. There were now 13 males who declared themselves undecided; 17 males had now selected a major. For the female group, 18 were still undecided and 17 were decided. Hotelling's T^2 statistic (Winer, 1962) was used to test for differences between the decided and undecided groups on the SVIB, OPI and ACT.

Results

There was no statistically significant difference on the SVIB, OPI and ACT between the decided and undecided females. All the OPI variables were within one standard deviation of the mean. The ACT Composite standard score for undecided females was 21, for those who had decided upon a major, the ACT score was 22. The SVIB profiles for the two female groups showed very few "high" scores, that is, standard scores of 40 and above on the Occupational

Scales and 58 or above on the Basic Interest Scales. The few high scores were centered in Group I, Health-Related Services. The undecided group scored 40 on Physical Education Teacher, Physical Therapist, and Radiologic Technologist; the decided group scored 39, 38 and 38 on these same scales. The vocationally decided females scored 40 on the Navy-Enlisted Scale, the undecided females scored 36 on the same Scale. Most of the other scores were "low"; that is, 30 or below. Neither of the two female groups had any high or low scores on the Basic Interest Scales[1].

For the males, there was no significant difference between the decided and undecided group on the ACT Composite Score. The undecided group had a mean score of 20 on the ACT; the mean score for the decided group was 22. On the OPI, both groups had scores that were within one standard deviation of the mean. However, there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups on the Response Bias (RB) scale (see Table 1). The mean RB score for the vocationally decided males was 14; the mean score for the undecided males was 11. For both groups of males, the only "high" score on the SVIB Occupational Scales was Musician Performer. The mean score for undecided males on this particular scale was 42; the decided group had a mean score of 44. Most of the other SVIB Occupational Scales were regarded as "low" for both decided and

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Insert Table 1 about here

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undecided students. There were very few high or low scores on the Basic Interest Scales for either group. The mean score on the Adventure Scale was 60 (a high score) for the decided group. The mean scores on the Technical Supervision and Mechanical Scales for the undecided group were 40 and 38 (low scores), respectively. On some of the SVIB scales the two comparison groups did differ significantly (see Table 1). The vocationally decided group scored significantly higher on three Basic Interest Scales--Mechanical, Teaching, and Art--as well as two Occupational Scales--Air Force Officer and Public Administrator. The undecided group scored significantly higher on the Veterinarian Scale.

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with those of Baird (1969), that is, "normal" students can be expected to have problems of vocational identity. All of the OPI scores for both males and females are within the normal range, indicating that their lack of vocational identity is probably not related to a personality problem. Yet the fact that vocationally undecided males score significantly lower on the RB scale than the decided group may have several implications. Heist and Yonge (1968) describe one characteristic of low scores on the RB scale as having difficulty concentrating on a problem for an extended length of time. Perhaps the undecided male is unable to attend to his problem for a long enough period of time to come to a solution. Also, this difference on the RB scale might mean that the undecided student felt less

positive about self and had generally "bad" feelings about his situation.

Since there are hardly any high scores on the SVIB, several assumptions can be made. One is that the population in this study had a rather restricted range of interests. They responded "like" less than 25 per cent of the time. Also, their interests may not have been measured by the SVIB.

All of the participants in this study sought professional counseling in their efforts to make a vocational choice. The following school year 50 per cent still had not made a vocational decision. Speculating about the counseling process in this study is risky since hard data are not available; however, it can be assumed that the counseling consisted of a period of information gathering by the counselor, the assigning of tests, and one or two additional sessions in which the test results are interpreted to the client. One of the things this study might do is to point out what types of clients can benefit from this type of counseling. This might be true especially for the males, those who scored significantly higher on the SVIB and OPI variables reported earlier, who may benefit from this type of counseling, whereas the undecided group may need something different.

Several research implications emerge as a result of this study. Further research needs to be conducted to determine if clients lacking vocational identity can indeed benefit from something other than a traditional counseling approach. Long-term

fol' w-up of the vocationally undecided student who makes a vocational commitment will provide data about stability of choice. Finally, additional research should be done to test the hypothesis that students who lack vocational identity have a difficult time concentrating on their problem for an extended length of time.

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Footnote

[1] Complete data on all variables for both males and females are available from the author upon request.

Table 1

COMPARISON OF MEAN SCORES OF DECIDED AND UNDECIDED MALES ON SVIB AND OPI VARIABLES

SVIB and OPI Variables	Undecided $\bar{X}$	Decided $\bar{X}$	df	t
Veterinarian (SVIB)	32	24	28	1.83[a]
Air Force Officer (SVIB)	21	27	28	2.09[b]
Public Administrator (SVIB)	20	26	28	1.86[a]
Mechanical (SVIB)	38	45	28	2.26[b]
Teaching (SVIB)	45	51	28	1.91[a]
Art (SVIB)	49	55	28	1.98[a]
Response Bias (OPI)	11	14	28	1.77[a]

Note.--Only significant items are included.

[a] $p < .05$.

[b] $p < .01$.